Core Humanitarian
STANDARD

Core Humanitarian Standard
on Quality and Accountability

Draft 2 for consultation & testing

17.06.2014

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Version 2 16-06-2014

i. Introduction

The Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS) outlines what good humanitarian action looks like for those communities and people affected by crisis and the staff and organisations involved in responding to this. It provides a practical, verifiable framework of Eight Commitments to Quality and Accountability. Each Commitment is underpinned by the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality and independence. The CHS will help women, men, girls and boys affected by crisis to hold humanitarian organisations to account. The CHS places people at the centre of humanitarian action and promotes respect for their fundamental human rights. The CHS is relevant to all actors engaged in humanitarian action. It can also be promoted and implemented by collective humanitarian mechanisms such as the cluster system, Humanitarian Country Teams, and pooled funds. Although it is primarily intended for the humanitarian sector, it can also be used to bring better quality and greater accountability to development and advocacy work.

This Standard is the result of a two-year consultation process across the humanitarian sector. It draws together key elements of existing humanitarian standards and commitments. These include:

- The Code of Conduct for The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief
- HAP Standard and Principles
- People In Aid Code of Good Practice
- Sphere Core Standards
- The Humanitarian Charter
- The Quality Compass
- The OECD DAC Criteria for Evaluating Development Assistance

Since this Standard builds on existing good practice, numerous tools already exist to support the implementation of each of the Eight Commitments. Additional guidance and tools will be developed to address gaps, and enable the widespread uptake of the standard by all humanitarian actors.

Those who apply this Standard reaffirm the primary responsibility of states to respect and protect all persons on their territories without discrimination and to provide assistance and protection to people in need. They also undertake to respect international humanitarian law, international human rights law, international refugee law, and other relevant international treaties and laws.

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Structure

The CHS translates humanitarian values, principles and good practice into verifiable requirements. The structure of the standard is as follows:

- Overarching values and principles;
- The Eight Commitments to communities and people affected by crisis.

For each Commitment the framework describes:

- What communities and people affected by crisis should expect from those involved in humanitarian action;
- What staff engaged in humanitarian action should do to consistently deliver high quality programmes and to be accountable to those they seek to assist;
- What organisations engaged in humanitarian action need to do to ensure their staff provide good quality and accountable humanitarian assistance.
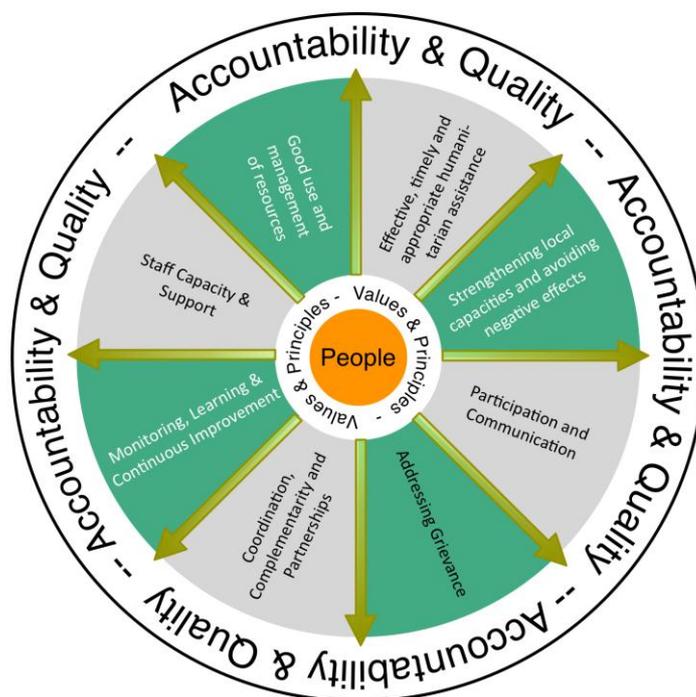

Figure 1: Graphic representation of the structure of the CHS

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ii. The Eight Commitments to Quality and Accountability

Values and Principles

People are at the heart of humanitarian action, which is guided by principles of humanity, impartiality and independence.

1. Effective, timely and appropriate humanitarian assistance

Communities and people affected by crisis have access to the humanitarian assistance they need in order to live their lives with dignity.

2. Strengthening local capacities and avoiding negative effects

Communities and people affected by crisis are more resilient, empowered and less vulnerable as a result of humanitarian action.

3. Communication and participation

Communities and people affected by crisis know their rights and entitlements, and are able to participate in all decisions that affect them.

4. Addressing grievance

Communities and people affected by crisis have access to a safe, accessible and responsive complaints mechanism.

5. Coordination, complementarity and partnerships

Communities and people affected by crisis receive coordinated, complementary assistance that meets their needs.

6. Monitoring, learning and continuous improvement

The organisation will examine and adjust its programmes and performance to improve outcomes for communities and people affected by crisis.

7. Staff capacity and support

The organisation has leadership and management practices that are equitable, legally compliant and ensure staff have the support, skills and attitudes to achieve agreed standards of programme delivery.

8. Good use and management of resources

The organisation uses resources efficiently and effectively for their intended purpose.

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iii. Scope

It is the responsibility of the organisation involved in humanitarian action to implement the CHS, not those communities and people affected by crisis.

The CHS can be used by those involved in humanitarian action:

- To improve the quality of services and bring greater accountability to communities and people affected by crisis;
- To develop work plans for progressive implementation and continuous improvement;
- As an overall quality and accountability framework supporting existing organisational and technical standards;
- To self-assess and improve the quality of programmes;
- To self-assess conformity with the CHS;
- As a basis for verification/certification of conformity, and to demonstrate this conformity to others.

The CHS can also be used to develop frameworks of partial or total equivalence with other standards, avoiding potential duplication between the CHS and other standards.

Claims

Any organisation wishing to use this Standard is encouraged to do so. However, public claims of conformity, partial conformity or implementation of the CHS can only be made in accordance with accepted verification models.

Adaptation to each organisation and context

Organisations agree to implement the Eight Commitments and their overarching humanitarian principles. Given the diversity of actors involved in humanitarian action, the way in which the Eight Commitments are implemented will differ from one organisation to the next. The actions required by the CHS may, therefore, be adapted to the organisation or the context. Those assessing an organisation's adherence to the CHS should base their assessment on the extent to which the organisation responds to the intent of the requirement.

An organisation that is unable to implement all of the requirements of the CHS is expected to justify the decision. In this case the organisation should develop ways to overcome these constraints.

iv. Values and Principles

Humanitarian action is guided by the principles of humanity, impartiality and independence.

Humanity: All people have intrinsic dignity and must be treated humanely in all circumstances, protecting life and health and ensuring respect for the human being.

Impartiality: Assistance must be given on the basis of needs alone, regardless of the race, creed or nationality of the recipient and without adverse distinction of any kind; priorities are calculated in proportion to need.

Independence: Assistance is provided based on need alone and organisations must not act as instruments of governments' foreign or domestic policy.

To put communities and people affected by crisis at the heart of humanitarian action:

Staff need to:

A. Be aware of and subscribe to the three principles above, and the stated mandate and values of the organisation.

B. Refer to the organisation's mandate and values in programme design and management.

The organisation needs to:

C. Reflect the principles of humanity, impartiality and independence as part of its organisational commitments, which are clearly stated in statutory and other relevant high-level governance documents.

D. Ensure that the mandate and values are clear and understood throughout the organisation and externally.

E. Reflect the organisation's commitments in policies, procedures, processes and other relevant operational documents, and communicate them to staff and other stakeholders.

F. Implement the Eight Commitments of this Standard in its humanitarian work.

G. Put in place fundraising policies and procedures to ensure funding does not compromise the humanitarian principles.

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v. The Commitments and requirements

1. Effective, timely and appropriate humanitarian assistance
Communities and people affected by crisis have access to the humanitarian assistance they need to live their lives with dignity.

Relevant staff:

1.1 Conduct a systematic, objective and regular analysis of the context, including a stakeholder mapping;

1.2 Design and implement programmes based on an assessment of needs, an understanding of vulnerabilities and priorities of different groups, and using accepted technical standards;

Note: Different groups include women, men, girls and boys, people with disabilities, elderly people, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT), and marginalised people.

1.3 Disaggregate programme data to reflect the different groups throughout all phases of the programme cycle;

1.4 Identify protection needs and either address them in the programme or refer them to an organisation with the relevant technical expertise;

1.5 Are aware of and use accepted sector technical standards and good practice to plan and assess their programmes, as relevant;

1.6 Inform communities and people affected by crisis and relevant stakeholders what the organisation is committing to do, by when and with whom;

1.7 Deliver assistance in a timely manner, making decisions and acting without undue delay;

1.8 Adapt the programme to changing needs and constraints;

1.9 Are impartial in making programming decisions, allocating assistance without discrimination and in proportion to needs;

1.10 Systematically include people that may be particularly disadvantaged in the programme, adapting assistance to the specific needs of groups, e.g. children, people with disabilities, elderly persons, etc.;

1.11 Where the organisation has an on-going presence, develop multi-stakeholder preparedness plans to prevent likely hazards and known vulnerabilities.

Organisational leadership ensures:

1.12 Policies reflect a commitment to impartial assistance based on needs and building on the capacities of communities and people affected by crisis;

1.13 Policies set out commitments to include vulnerable and marginalised groups;

1.14 Staff have guidance on how to deal with people in need of protection and the process for referral to other organisations with relevant technical expertise;

1.15 Operations reflect policy commitments and undergo:

    a. A systematic, objective and on-going analysis of the needs and context;

    b. An assessment of the needs, priorities and capacities of communities and people affected by crisis, engaging them in accordance with 1.1;

    c. Timely decision-making, with resources allocated accordingly.

2. Strengthening local capacities and avoiding negative effects
Communities and people affected by crisis are more resilient, empowered and less vulnerable as a result of humanitarian action.

Relevant staff:

2.1 Ensure programmes build on and strengthen local capacities and community resilience;

2.2 Use the results of any existing community hazard and risk assessments and preparedness plans to guide activities;

2.3 Enable the development of local leadership and organisations in their capacity as first responders;

2.4 Plan the transition or exit strategy in the early stages of the humanitarian programme to ensure longer-term positive effects and reduce the risk of dependency;

2.5 Design and implement programmes that benefit the local economy and promote recovery;

2.6 Identify and act upon potential or actual negative effects in a timely manner, including but not limited to:

    a. People's security;

    b. Gender, social and political systems and relationships;

    c. Livelihoods;

    d. The local economy;

    e. The environment.

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Organisational leadership ensures:

2.7 Policies and strategies reflect a commitment to avoiding negative effects and strengthening local capacities;

2.8 Staff have guidance to understand the risk and potential negative effects of humanitarian action and the support to manage them;

2.9 There is a system to safeguard personal information that could put people at risk.

3. Communication and participation
Communities and people affected by crisis know their rights and entitlements, and are able to participate in all decisions that affect them.

Relevant staff:

3.1 Communicate with, and listen to, communities and people affected by crisis and other local actors respectfully;

3.2 Establish appropriate contact points and timely two-way communication channels with the communities and people affected by the organisation's activities, including local institutions, other organisations and authorities;

3.3 Provide information to communities and people affected by crisis about the organisation, the principles it adheres to, its staff code of conduct, and its programmes and deliverables;

3.4 Communicate in languages, formats and media that are easily understood and respectful and culturally appropriate for different parts of the community, especially vulnerable groups;

3.5 Ensure appropriate representation of people and communities that the programme targets and other stakeholders throughout the project cycle, paying special attention to vulnerable and marginalised people;

3.6 Take into account the views of communities and people affected by crisis in project decision-making, throughout the initial assessment, design, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the projects or programmes;

3.7 Encourage communities and people affected by crisis to provide feedback on performance and their level of satisfaction with the quality of assistance.

Organisational leadership ensures:

3.8   A culture of open communication and participation exists for all staff;

3.9   Staff have adequate expertise, support, time and resources to implement requirements 3.1 to 3.7;

3.10   Information-sharing policies and processes are in place that enable and support staff to complete requirements 3.1 to 3.7;

3.11   Processes exist to engage communities and people affected by crisis in the design and planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of projects or programmes, including those that support requirements 3.1 to 3.7;

3.12   External communications and fundraising are accurate, ethical and respectful, presenting communities and people affected by crisis as dignified human beings.

4.   Addressing grievance
Communities and people affected by crisis have access to a safe and responsive complaints mechanism.

Relevant staff:

4.1   Welcome and accept complaints, and ensure appropriate confidentiality as necessary;

4.2   Put in place a complaints handling process in consultation with communities and people affected by crisis, including mechanisms to effectively protect complainants;

4.3   Communicate proactively how the complaints mechanism can be accessed, what the organisation is responsible for, who can complain and how the complaints are handled;

4.4   Communicate what behaviour communities and other stakeholders can expect from staff;

4.5   Document, respond to and act on complaints in a timely, fair and appropriate way.

Organisational leadership ensures:

4.6   An organisational culture in which complaints are welcomed and seen as a learning opportunity;

4.7   Expectations of staff conduct are defined, including commitments to the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse of people affected by crisis by the organisation's staff;

4.8   A safe, contextually appropriate, accessible and responsive complaints handling process is documented and in place for communities and people affected by crisis and staff, setting out:

   a.   The conditions for lodging a complaint, including for fast-tracking allegations of exploitation and abuse;

b.   Mechanisms to protect complainants and witnesses;

c.   Directions to adapt the process, in engagement with its potential users, to their preferences and needs;

d.   Mechanisms to facilitate access by disadvantaged people and groups;

e.   A mechanism to record past and current complaints and their resolution.

4.9   Complaints are referred to a relevant party when they do not fall within the scope of the organisation.

5.   Coordination, complementarity and partnerships
Communities and people affected by crisis receive coordinated, complementary assistance that meets their needs.

Relevant staff:

5.1   Ensure complementarity of humanitarian action with that of national and local authorities;

5.2   Participate in relevant coordination bodies to avoid duplication, ensure coherence, fill gaps and identify areas for collaboration to maximise coverage and aim to provide a full range of humanitarian services;

5.3   Provide necessary information to partners, coordination groups and other relevant local actors through appropriate communication channels;

5.4   Identify the role, capacity, activities and interests of local actors, humanitarian agencies, local authorities, civil society and other relevant bodies;

5.5   Use the stakeholder mapping in 5.4 above to coordinate with and complement the work of other organisations;

5.6   Support partners so that they can fulfil their humanitarian commitments;

5.7   Update relevant stakeholders about progress, major delays and/or shortages.

Organisational leadership ensures:

5.8   Policies and strategies include a clear commitment to coordination and collaboration with others, without compromising humanitarian principles;

5.9   Any arrangements to work with partners are governed by a consistent approach that:

a.   Ensures that staff have adequate technical capacity, experience and resources to work with partners;

b.   Respects each other's mandates, obligations and independence and recognises each other's constraints and commitments;

c.   Supports partners to engage in coordination, planning, design and implementation.

6.   Monitoring, learning and continuous improvement
The organisation will examine and adjust its programmes and performance to improve outcomes for communities and people affected by crisis.

Relevant staff:

6.1   Use prior evidence, lessons and experience when designing programmes;

6.2   Monitor what is being done and what is being achieved;

6.3   Adapt programmes to incorporate changing needs or context, or lessons from experience;

6.4   Evaluate processes, activities, outcomes and impact for the communities and people affected by crisis;

6.5   Discuss relevant findings with communities and people affected by crisis, partners, donors and other stakeholders;

6.6   Share learning internally and externally.

Organisational leadership ensures:

6.7   Policies and processes reflect a commitment to involve communities and people affected by crisis in systematic monitoring and evaluation of programmes, to ensure they achieve quality results;

6.8   Policies and practices are consistent with organisational and programme aims, and are effective;

6.9   Evidence from monitoring and evaluations is used to improve existing and future procedures and programmes;

6.10   Relevant findings are made available to communities and people affected by crisis, partners, donors and other stakeholders;

6.11   The organisation contributes to peer and sector learning in humanitarian response.

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7. Staff capacity and support

The organisation has leadership and management practices that are equitable, legally compliant and ensure staff have the support, skills and attitude to achieve agreed standards of programme delivery.

Relevant staff:

7.1 Are aware of the policies which are relevant to them and of the consequences of not following them. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

   a. Familiarising themselves with and adhering to the organisation's code of conduct;

   b. Reporting abuse, corruption or other inappropriate practices using agreed processes.

Organisational leadership ensures:

7.2 Recruitment policies and procedures are fair, transparent and non-discriminatory;

7.3 A staff code of conduct is in place that refers to, at a minimum:

   a. Not exploiting and abusing people;
   b. Being sensitive to, and respectful of, the local culture;
   c. Consequences of non-compliance with the code of conduct.

7.4 Staff have a clear understanding of what is required from them, including responsibilities and reporting lines;

7.5 As relevant, resources are available for learning and development for staff to improve their skills and competencies;

7.6 Managers ensure the wellbeing of their staff, including security and occupational health and safety;

7.7 The workforce has the capacity and capability to deliver the programmes of work;

   Note: The organisation can provide surge support in times of emergency.

7.8 Staff have clearly defined objectives, aligned with current work plans, which are regularly reviewed and against which performance is assessed;

7.9   Staff have adequate human, technical and management competencies to fulfil their role;

7.10   The organisation applies the relevant Principles and Commitments of the CHS to staff as well as to those it is assisting.

8.   Good use and management of resources
Organisations use resources efficiently and effectively for their intended purpose.

Relevant staff:

8.1   Design programmes and implement procurement processes to maximise value for money - balancing quality, cost and timeliness at each phase of the response;

8.2   Optimise the management of resources to achieve the intended purpose without waste;

8.3   Monitor and report expenditure against budget;

8.4   Ensure goods and commodities are stored, transported and distributed in a way that reduces spoilage, loss and waste;

8.5   Use local natural resources with due care to the impact on the environment;

8.6   Manage knowledge and non-confidential information so that it can be readily accessed and shared;

8.7   Use funds and goods for their intended purposes;

8.8   Manage risk of corruption and take appropriate action if identified.

Organisational leadership ensures:

8.9   Policies and procedures are in place governing the use and management of funds;

8.10   Policies and procedures establish how the organisation:

   a.   Accepts and allocates funds ethically and legally;
   b.   Prevents and addresses corruption, conflict of interests and misuse of resources.

8.11   Regular audits are conducted to verify compliance;

8.12   Programme design and procurement processes optimise value for money - balancing quality, cost and timeliness at each phase of the response.

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vi. Supporting documents

The following documents will support the implementation of the CHS:

- Guidance notes and documents (to be developed on an on-going basis);
- The claim policy (to be developed by the end of 2014);
- Technical standards for sectors as relevant (list to be identified during the second phase of the consultation);
- The verification framework (to be identified by the end of 2014) which can be used for internal and/or external verification.

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vii. Terms and definitions

For the purpose of this Standard, the following definitions apply:

Accountability: process by which organisations and their staff fulfil and respect their legal and ethical responsibilities and use their power responsibly in humanitarian action.

Communities and people affected by crisis: the totality of women, men, girls and boys with different needs, vulnerabilities and capacities affected by disasters, conflict or poverty or other crises at a specific location.

Complementarity: relationship or situation in which two or more different agencies, programmes or actions improve or emphasise each other's qualities without duplicating them.

Conformity assessment: any activity concerned with determining directly or indirectly that relevant requirements are fulfilled.

Note: Typical examples of conformity assessment activities are sampling, testing and inspection; evaluation, verification and assurance of conformity such as certification, registration, accreditation and approval as well as their combinations.

Documenting: any form of record of discussions, agreements, decisions and/or actions, etc. that is reproducible.

Effectiveness: the measure of the extent to which an aid activity attains its objectives.

Engagement: process by which the organisation communicates, consults and/or provides for the participation of interested and/or affected stakeholders, ensuring that their concerns, desires, expectations, needs, rights and opportunities are considered in the establishment, implementation and updating of the programmes.

Humanity: all people have intrinsic dignity and must be treated humanely in all circumstances, protecting life and health and ensuring respect for the human being.

Impartiality: assistance must be given on the basis of needs alone, regardless of the race, creed or nationality of the recipient and without adverse distinction of any kind; priorities are calculated in proportion to need.

Independence: assistance is provided based on need alone and organisations must not act as instruments of governments' foreign or domestic policy.

Organisation: an entity that has the management structure and power to implement the standard.

Note: The organisation can refer to a single organisation, a collaboration of several organisations within a specific programme, a grouping of several organisations under one umbrella (e.g. members of a network), a subset of an oganisation, an individual or any other entity provided it has the management structure and power to implement the standard and can be held responsible for its implementation.

Partners: organisations working jointly within a formal arrangement to achieve a specific goal, with clear and agreed roles and responsibilities for each of them.

Quality: assistance that is fit for purpose.

Staff: an organisation's national and international permanent or short-term employees, as well as volunteers, consultants and any designated representative of an organisation.

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